1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

Silver chains are worn by men as well as by women. The men wear them round the waist like a belt, and the women hang them round their necks, the chains being allowed to depend as low as the waist. Bracelets are worn by women; these are either of gold or of silver. The Lynngam males wear bead necklaces, the beads being sometimes of cornelian gathered from the beds of the local hill streams, and sometimes of glass obtained from the plains markets of Dauara and Moiskhola. The cornelian necklaces are much prized by the Lynngams, and are called by them *'pieng blei*, or gods' necklaces. Like the Garos, the Lynngams wear as many brass earrings as possible, the lobes of the ears of the females being frequently greatly distended by their weight. These earrings are made out of brass wire obtained from the plains markets. The Lynngams wear silver armlets above the elbow and also on the wrists. It is only a man who has given a great feast who can wear silver armlets above the elbows. These armlets are taken off as a sign of mourning, but never on ordinary occasions. The Lynngams do not wear Khasi jewellery, but jewellery of a pattern to be seen in the Garo Hills. A distinctive feature of the Lynngam women is the very large number of blue bead necklaces they wear. They put on such a large number as to give them almost the appearance of wearing horse collars. These beads are obtained from the plains markets, and are of glass. Further detailed information regarding this subject can be obtained from Mr. Henniker's monograph, which contains a good plate illustrating the different articles of jewellery.

WEAPONS.

The weapons of the Khasis are swords, spears, bows and arrows, and a circular shield which was used formerly for purposes of defence. The swords are usually of wrought iron, occasionally of steel, and are forged in the local smithies. The Khasi sword is of considerable length, and possesses the peculiarity of not having a handle of different material from that which is used for the blade. In the Khasi sword the handle is never made of wood or bone, or

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MARRIAGE.

591 It is proposed in this section to consider marriage from its social side, the religious aspect thereof being reserved for another paragraph. The most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage is that it is usual for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law's house, and not for him to take his bride home, as is the case in other communities. This arrangement amongst the Khasis is no doubt due to the prevalence of the matriarchate. As long as the wife lives in her mother's house, all her earnings go to her mother, who expends them on the maintenance of the family. Amongst the Khasis, after one or two children are born, and if a married couple get on well together, the husband frequently removes his wife and family to a house of his own, and from the time the wife leaves her mother's house she and her husband pool their earnings, which are expended for the support of the family. Amongst 591 the Syntengs, however, and the people of Maosbai, the case 576 is different, for with them the husband does not go and live in his mother-in-law's house, he only visits her there. In Jowai some people admitted to me that the husband came to his mother-in-law's house only after dark, and that he did not eat, smoke, or even partake of betel-nut there, the idea being that because none of his earnings go to support this house, therefore it is not etiquette for him to partake of food or other refreshment there. If a Synteng house is visited, it is unusual to find the husbands of any of the married daughters there, although the sons of the family may be seen in the house when they have returned from work. Generally in the day-time you will find in a Synteng dwelling an old crone, who is the grandmother, or even the great-grandmother, of the family, also grandchildren or great-grandchildren; but the husbands of the 796 married daughters are not there. The Syntengs seem to have 611 more closely preserved the customs of the matriarchate than the Khasis, and the Syntengs claim that their sions or religious ceremonies are purer, i.e. that they more closely correspond to what they were in ancient times than those of the 589 Khasis. Amongst the Syntengs, occasionally, a widow is 765 allowed to keep her husband's bones after his death, on con-

1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

dition that she does not remarry; the idea being that as long as the bones remain in the widow's keeping, the spirit of her husband is still with her. On this account many wives who revere their husband's memories, and who do not contemplate remarriage, purposely keep the bones for a long time. If a widow marries, even after the customary taboo period of one year, whilst her deceased husband's bones are still in her keeping, she is generally looked down upon. Her children in such a case perform the ceremony of handing over the bones of their father to his clan in a building specially erected for the purpose. The widow cannot enter therein, or even go near it, whilst the ceremony is proceeding, no matter whether the *jing sang*, or the price for removing the taboo after a husband's death, has been paid to the husband's clan or not. There is no evidence to show that polyandry ever existed amongst the Khasis. Unlike the Thibetans, the Khasi women seem to have contented themselves always with one husband, at any rate with one at a time. Certainly at the present day they are monandrists. Polygamy does not exist amongst the Khasis; such a practice would naturally not be in vogue amongst a people who observe the matriarchate. There are instances, however, of men having wives other than those they have regularly married, and in the War country children by such wives enjoy rights to their father's acquired property equally with the children by the legally married wife. As the clans are strictly exogamous, a Khasi cannot take a wife from his own clan; to do this would entail the most disastrous religious, as well as social consequences. For to marry within the clan is the greatest sin a Khasi can commit, and would cause excommunication by his kinsfolk and the refusal of funeral ceremonies at death, and his bones would not be allowed a resting-place in the sepulchre of the clan. To give a list of all the Khasi exogamous clans would perhaps serve no useful purpose, but I have prepared from information, kindly furnished me by the Siems of Khyrim and Cherrapunji, a list of the clans in those States which will be found in Appendices A and B. These will suffice as examples. It will be seen from the Cherra list that the different divisions of the Diengdoh clan, viz. Lolo, Diengdoh-bah, Diengdoh-kylla, are prohibited from intermarriage; this is due to these branches of the clan being

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wood are placed around the body, and the egg; "*u'leng kpoh*," is broken, not over the stomach of the deceased, as has been sometimes supposed, but by being thrown on the pyre in the direction of the feet of the corpse. Fire is applied to the pyre, first by the *kur*, or members of the clan, and then by the children, if any, of the deceased. Another fowl, "*u'iar padat*," is sacrificed, its blood being smeared round the pyre three times, and across the corpse three times. The bier is then broken to pieces, the cloths having been removed from it previously. The eatables and the jaw-bones of the sacrificial animals are then placed at the head of the pyre. After the fowl (*u'iar padat*) has been sacrificed, the three arrows already mentioned are shot from the bow, one to the north, another to the south, and the third to the east. These arrows are called *ki 'saw tyngem*. It is, perhaps, significant that the arrows which are shot at death correspond in numbers with those which are used at the time of the birth ceremony. When the fire has blazed up, another goat, "*u'lang dholia*," is sacrificed. In some cases all the clothes of the deceased are burnt with the body, in others the clothes are merely held over the fire and then taken away, after which they can be used (this is only in the case of poor persons). Before leaving the burning-place the relatives and friends of the deceased place betel-nuts on the pyre and bid farewell to the deceased, saying "*Khoblei khie leit iaw kwai sha iing u Blei ho*" (good-bye, go and eat betel-nut in the house of god). When the body has been thoroughly burnt, the fire is extinguished with water, and the uncalcined bones are collected by the relatives in three trips. The collectors are not allowed to turn back and pick up a bone which has been forgotten in any one of these trips. The bones thus collected are carefully wrapped in a piece of white cloth by the female relatives, and an old member of the family throws on the ground some powdered rice from a leaf, at the same time adjuring the spirit of the deceased not to trouble the *kur*, or the family, as the funeral ceremonies have been duly performed. The party then sets out to the bone repository, or *mawshieng*. In front walks one who strews along the line of route leaves of the tree known by the Khasis as *diewj shit* (the berries of which are used for fishing with), and grains of rice, all the way from the pyre to the cairn.

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If any stream has to be crossed, a rough bridge is made of branches and grass. This trail of leaves and the bridges are intended to guide the spirit of the deceased to the cairn. The person who carries the bones is not allowed to turn round, or to the right, or to the left, but must proceed straight to the cairn. On reaching it, a *nongbaia*, or sacrificer, washes the bones three times and then places them in an earthen pot, tying up the mouth with a white cloth. Then, having taken three pieces of the hard yolk of an egg, three leaves of bread, the leg of the fowl, "*u'iar kmad kynti*," and the lower jaw-bones of the animals which have been sacrificed, he places them inside the cairn and shuts the door. Betelnut and betel-nut are then placed on the top of the cairn. Early next morning the relatives and friends go to the cairn with fresh food and water, and look about for new foot-prints, the idea being that from these foot-prints they can foretell future events. This they do until the third night after the cremation. During these three nights the front door of the house formerly occupied by the deceased is never closed, it being thought that the spirit may wish to return and visit its earthly abode. The whole family is moreover *seng*, or taboo, during this period, and no manner of work can be done. When the three nights are over, it is called the *kait ia*, i.e. the days (of mourning) are passed, and three eggs are broken to ascertain what was the cause of the death. After this the family goes to bathe, and the clothes and mats in the house are washed. When this has been done, the taboo is removed and the family can go to work. After a month a pig or a fowl is sacrificed, the ceremony being called "*ai baw kait kmai*." It will be observed that three seems to be the lucky number throughout these funeral ceremonies. The number seems to bear a similar significance in other matters of Khasi ritual, e.g. the pouring out of libations, which is always done three times.

It is *seng* or taboo for a Khasi widow to re-marry within one year from the death of her husband, there is a similar prohibition for a husband re-marrying; but such *seng* can be got over by the payment of a fine to the clan of the deceased. After the expiration of one year the fine is reduced in amount. Khasi widows do not as a rule re-marry, according to U Jashon Roy.

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and throw up the seeds or cowries into the air, and when they fall to the ground they say, "*to ello sah ka sqvit ca lum ca lyndoo sah ia phi*," come now we will collect you (the idea being that the seeds represent the bones of the deceased). Having collected the seeds, they place them on a bier and perform the service for the dead just in the same way as if a real dead body were to hand. If possible, a portion of the dead person's clothes should be burnt with the seeds in the bier, and it is with this view that the coats or cloths of Khasi coolies, who die when employed as porters on military expeditions at a distance from their homes, are brought back by their friends to give to the relatives. If a person dies of cholera, small-pox, or other such infectious or contagious diseases, the body is buried, but is dug up again and burnt with all the customary rites when fear of infection or contagion is over. In parts of the district upright stones called *mau-sendei* are erected along the line of route when the remains of a person who has met with an accidental death are brought home. This is stated to be the case in the Bandwai Simaship.

SIMILAR RITES CURIOUS IN CONNECTION WITH DEATH.

In Mongjri, a large village in the War Country, the dead body is placed on a bier near the door of the house, a turban being tied about the head, the face being left bare and turned towards the door. In some of the Shella villages a second cremation is performed, in which a bamboo frame-work represents the corpse. This second cremation takes place when the body has been disposed of without the requisite ceremonies. The bones and ashes of the dead in Shella are in some cases kept in a cavity hollowed out of a post erected for the purpose. The bones and ashes find a temporary resting-place here, but are afterwards removed to a cromlech.

At Nartiang, in the Jaintia Hills, the head of the corpse is shaved, but a tuft of hair in the middle of the head is left; this is called (u'kiah Iwohei), the great grandmother's lock. At Nartiang head-rest, which has been shaved by one of the mourners, is put into the mouth of the corpse, also cooked rice. There is

M4 M2 that are not burned up and the Ashes (among the Khasi).

and wrapped in a small piece of cloth and then put in an urn (jar). While a woman is doing this, a man strews rice on the ground and entreats the spirit of the deceased not to disturb his relatives who have remained behind in the world, since everything was done correctly at the cremation. When this entreaty is finished, the urn with the remains of the bones is placed under the tombstone (maw shying). The remains of poor people are also put under this stone but not in an urn. The sacrificial rice (ka japha) is also placed by the urn as food for the deceased (cf. the next section).

M4 M2 Early the next day they count up together the expenditures they have had. Speeches are made by the u kni u kpa (the maternal uncle) to the assembled children and grandchildren. This u kni u kpa (M4) has been the priest and judge of the sib up until now. Now all business stops for three days. But on the third day they gamble (draw lots - bud pylleng) with two eggs to see who will be the leader of the sib of the deceased in the future, so that one will know to whom one should turn when sacrifices must be offered or quarrels are to be smoothed out. Thereby the present u kni u kpa speaks in relation to the deceased:

Nei ap ia ka nia ka jutang puda ia kum ia kynohew ia u wur u para u khun ka mainah ka mainan pa ee tai ia ka khein ka ki char pa ee long ka

Be heaven unto the words of the promise! After the relatives and brothers and sisters of the mothers-in-law and aunts are gathered, we will gift

● 765 ai ban ka ai sa ia ne ka kynrong ka hyntaw ka pyrkhiah ka pynmarg, dih sa ka kiad sa ka um mi

our words and our sacrifices and out judgments and then will be: to care for thee and to nourish thee and to carry over thy bones and to care for thee in sickness and to make thee healthy. So we wish to drink the liquor and the water, is it no so? (32)

[273] 32. The water is a fermented rice water, that is variously called rice beer. The last sentence has the sense of an affirmation and of an oath.

Hei ongew ryngkat ne phi ka blei ka laubei ka nonglum nongkynshew shi khrum ka nar noi

So hear then, o goddess, thou Laubei, thou who has gathered us here, one and all (33) the whole sib

33. Shi khrum - actually the hollow place, the place under the house.

and stone and iron, is it not so?

764 772 As there are various customs for sacrifices, so are the ceremonies for cremation various. It is reported (34) that on the day of

34. Gurdon, The Khasi, p. 133.

cremation pigs are slaughtered by the relatives of the deceased. Those, who cannot afford to

13:Mukherjee E-5 (1954)1958 AR7 Khasi AR7

of a clan some ceremonial attachment developed out of the custom of depositing the bones of the clansmen in clan ossuary and renewing the relationship between the clansmen on the ceremonial occasion of *thaphnaiñiah* when the bones were finally transferred from *mawshieng* (ossuary of a sub-clan) to *mawbah* (ossuary of a clan).

Social bond among the clansmen is due to the performance of common religious ceremonies (*pâwr*), worship of common deities and spirits of household (*Kwaidnia*), water (*pwi*) and hills (*Kwaidkum*) and observance of mourning for three days for the death of clansmen with the cessation of outdoor work specially with implements.

Economic bond among them is due further to the possession of common land (*rikor*), which is divided into separate holdings held by families.

Sub-clan (*Ka-k'jam*)—Unlike the clan, sub-clan has nothing to do with the regulation of marriage. Its main functions are socio-religious. Mutual interest in the welfare of the members of sub-clan evinced in the observance of *sibaw** in honour of the dead grandmother, profund sentiment grown out of the former practice of depositing the bones of the dead persons of the same sub-clan in *mawshieng* and the responsibility of bearing the expenses for *thaphnaiñiah* bind the members together.

The observance of mourning on the death of a person of the same sub-clan for three days and the consequent

*Offering of food to the spirits of the dead ancestors.

13:Mukherjee E-5 (1954)1958 AR7 Khasi AR7

613 [769]

cessation of transaction of money (*khoinabei*) during the period, compulsory social participation in marriage, household worship, and funeral ritual, and the pride for the privilege in succession to *siem-ship* (chieftain ship) hold together the inner structure of the society in fulfilling its function.

594 596 602

Family (*Ka-iing*)—The functions of family centre round the :

1. performance of basic religious rites,
2. management and inheritance of family property,
3. maintenance of social relations with the kin of *ka-kʼjuh* and *ka-kur*,
4. protection of familial kin.

602 967

From the above discussions it may be inferred that the social groupings of the Khasis function in different dimensions and make the individuals aware of their duties, and obligations towards each other. In the process of socialisation and enculturation of the individual they learn that the individuals, the different social groups and the community at large are inseparable.

Even from infancy a boy is infused with the idea that family comes first in regard, sub-clan second, and clan third. The kin of the family are primary relatives, and those of the sub-clan and the clan are secondary and tertiary respectively. [553] One bow and three arrows given by a father to his son in his naming ceremony (*jaekhaw*) symbolise their relationships with the three social groups. With the first arrow man has to fight for *ski-iing* (members of the same family) and *ski-kʼjuh* (members of the same sub-clan), with the second for his *ski-kur* and with the third for the state.

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

necessary. The chances of acquiring a piece of land nowadays are small, except for very successful men, and usually the size of the plot is only just enough to maintain one household. When this land is passed on to the next generation, the youngest daughter will hold the title to it. This fact tends to exclude married elder sisters from the right to use the land, since it is not sufficient for more than one household. Thus the ultimogeniture succession rule seems to have developed more sharply and to have encouraged limited inheritance in conjunction with the shortage of land.

This tendency creates unbalance in the economy of the households within a community. It is a usual picture in Khasi villages, for the bigger and well-built houses to be occupied by the youngest daughter's family, while the elder sisters reside in poor huts. Youngest daughters are usually landowners, while their elder sisters have often to become day-labourers after their marriage, unless their husbands are capable men, or their fathers wealthy enough to give them some share of their acquired property. On the whole, the variations at present between rich and poor are considerable in a Khasi community, in comparison with that of the Garo, where the economic condition of each household in a village is more or less similar. These differences are not only a matter of economic organisation but arise from the nature of each social structure.

The economic and social patterns of Sohkynduh and Kongton are very similar, but their dialects are slightly different: my interpreter, who came from Cherrapunje, could work quite well at Sohkynduh, but at Kongton he found some difficulty, especially with the speech of the old men, and with their religious expressions. The head man of Kongton, who was quite accustomed to the Cherra dialect, acted as an interpreter for us. Such differences in dialect in the Khasi Hills are common phenomena; it is said that every valley has its own dialect. Differences are found not only in speaking, but also, to a certain extent, in culture and in social usages.

II. Village Exogamy

One of the outstanding features of Khasi social organization is the predominant tendency of endogamy on the level of the village, which contrasts with the structural orientation of the Garo village exogamy. This is closely connected with the distributions of clans and the nature of the descent groups.

The Khasi population consists of a number of *kur*, matrilineal clans, whose members consider themselves to be descended from a common ancestress. The members of the same *kur* have a common

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

614 *mauba* (grave stone), in which the bones of all the dead members are buried. When the *mauba* becomes full, or some members move [765] away to a considerable distance, they provide another branch *mauba*, [769] creating a new *kur*.[1] Thus in course of time, every older *kur* occasionally branches off. Every branch *kur* has a different name, but can be grouped into a major *kur* thus forming a distinct exogamous group. Relationships among the minor *kur* of one major *kur* are usually known, or can be ascertained, so that marriages among these members are avoided. When the Khasi express this kind of group consciousness, they use the term *jai* (own people). For outsiders, it is difficult to know through the names of minor *kur* whether *kur* A and *kur* B are of the same group or not.

However, neither clan solidarity nor corporative activities are found among the Khasi, except in those clans which are considered of higher status, and maintain a functional position in the political or religious fields. Such are the Siem of the ruling clan and the Ringdoh of the priest clan, etc. Among commoners like the villagers of Sohkynduh and Kongton, the importance of a *kur* is confined to recognising a common ancestress, with a common *mauba* conception, which requires them to maintain a strict exogamous rule. But whether of major or minor *kur*, its members do not meet together or have a common leader. Actually major *kur* of which there are a considerable number all over the Khasi Hills, have no clear-cut geographical distribution. Each is scattered over a wide area, cutting across territory which includes several villages, and mixing with various other *kur*. Indeed, some of them are very widely distributed geographically and found in almost all regions of the Khasi Hills. A minor *kur* is also scattered over many different villages, though it shows more concentration than the major one. Consequently a village may be composed of small segments [621] of more than a dozen different *kur*. Even these small segments of each *kur* found in a single village have little or no sense of kin-group solidarity, unless the members have quite close kinship ties. In many cases, though some members have the same *kur* name, their relationship may be distant, so that they cannot always reconstruct their genealogical relationship. In such a case their behaviour and attitude towards the same *kur* members and towards other *kur* members show no difference.

613 Individuals are not grouped actually under the name of *kur* but in a smaller group of matrilineal descendants from one great-grand-

[764] 1. The Khasi cremate dead bodies; bones and ashes are usually kept in a spot near the youngest sister's house which is the centre of a functional descent group, for many years and finally placed in the *mauba* of the *kur*. They say that these bones are to be collected and replaced into the *mauba* every hundred years with a great ceremony. However, some of villagers are certain about the year when the last ceremony was held.

God or Goddess, deities regarded as helpful in bringing prosperity, producing fertility, and so on. Rituals of this kind are no longer practiced, except for the Bedinghkhlam ceremony designed to protect the Jaintia village of Jowai. Finally, the state religion of many chiefdoms was expressed in one great ceremony per year which was intended to secure ancestral blessing for a chief and his lineage, and, through this, for the entire chiefdom. The notable example, still practiced, is the Pomblang System of Khyrim chiefdom. [Cf. Lyngdoh 1937, 1940, Stegmiller 1934b, Becker 1908.] **Illness and medicine.** In time of illness, a Khasi calls in a sacrificer, and possibly also a medicine man. The medicine man is an ordinary individual who has hit upon some herbal remedy for one or more ailments, who has become famous enough to be sought out and rewarded in cash, and who jealously guards the formula of his medicine until it dies with him. He and his patients tend to regard him as specially blessed. **Soul, death, and afterlife.** The universe is comprised of a heaven, the earth, and the air between. Heaven is where the souls of deceased mortals live in eternal peace, grouped sib by sib. The earth and all nature were created by God, and everything that God created has its own individual soul. There is no other great earth deity, for it was God who created the earth. The air is inhabited by the wandering souls of those dead for whom full death rites were not performed. A Khasi's potentiality for enjoying an afterlife in heaven with his ancestors depends on his receiving proper death rites at the hands of his sib mates. First, his body is cremated by his children, notably his youngest daughter, and his bones are collected and deposited temporarily in a small, stone receptacle. All work stops in the village while everyone participates in the funeral. Once every several years, an entire sib gathers to witness the transfer of the bones of recently deceased sib mates from their temporary receptacles to the great sib cairn that is in the keeping of the youngest daughter, descended from the sib ancestress through a line of youngest daughters. This final ceremony covers five days, and is elaborate and expensive, but when an individual's bones are finally resting with those of his antecedents in the cairn, it is understood that his soul is finally in heaven, "sitting hotel out in the house of God."

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